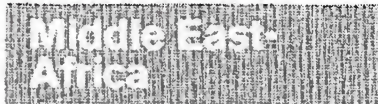


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ISRAEL-LEBANON

Israeli troops moved into the frontier region of southern Lebanon in force this week and occupied Palestinian commando strongholds following a terrorist attack in northern Israel on 11 March that resulted in the death of 36 Israelis. Israel's leaders apparently are prepared to keep their invading force in place for some time. The Arab world universally condemned the Israeli action and Egypt is clearly concerned that it may spell the end of President Sadat's peace initiative.

Some 17 hours after launching its military operation on 15 March, Israel announced that its forces had attained their primary objectives. Sporadic fighting continued in some areas on 16 March, however, as the Israelis consolidated their hold on the border zone.

Defense Minister Weizman stated that the invasion was carried out to connect existing Lebanese Christian enclaves in the southern part of the country, and to establish a security belt some seven to 10 kilometers wide along the entire border from Mount Hermon to the sea. Prime Minister Begin has said that Israel will not withdraw its forces until some agreement is reached that bars Palestinian guerrillas from returning to southern Lebanon.

The principal Israeli objectives in the border region were the Palestinian strongholds of Naqurah on the Mediterranean, Bint Jubayl and Marun ar Ras in the central sector, and At Tayyibah and Al Khiyam in the eastern sector. All were captured quickly, although Palestinian resistance was stiff in some places. On 16 March, fighting was reported east of Al Khiyam and northwest of Bint Jubayl, where the Israelis appeared to be straightening out their lines.

Other stated Israeli goals were to destroy guerrilla supply and logistic bases

in the south and to wipe out known staging points for terrorist raids. Air attacks were carried out on 15 March against the coastal town of Ad Damur, about 10 kilometers south of Beirut, which the Israelis say was the base from which the commandos of Yasir Arafat's Fatah organization launched the terrorist raid last weekend. The Israelis also bombed Palestinian facilities in the port city of Tyre and a suspected Palestinian docking facility in south Beirut.

The Israeli Government has passed assurances to Syria that Israel wants to avoid any encounters with Syrian forces or aircraft over the current operations in Lebanon. Defense Minister Weizman indicated on 16 March that Israeli aircraft were prohibited from flying missions north of the Litani River, except for reconnaissance or in response to fire directed at Israeli forces or Israeli border settlements from the Litani region.

Although Syria announced that it would provide "air defense" for Lebanon, in fact there has been no significant military reaction so far on the part of the Syrians to the Israeli move. Given its military weakness, Syria will try to avoid direct contact between its regular forces—

it has nearly 30,000 men in Lebanon—and the Israelis. Syrian units in Beirut have been positioned to discourage Christian elements in the capital from attempting to take advantage of the situation.

Arab Reaction

Egyptians see the Fatah terrorist raid last week and the massive Israeli military operation this week as serious, perhaps fatal, blows to President Sadat's peace initiative. They probably now have little hope Israel will agree any time soon to a declaration of principles that would meet their minimal demands on the Palestinian issue.

President Sadat, who earlier this week denounced the recent Palestinian terrorist action, on 16 March belatedly joined other Arab leaders in condemning Israel's move into Lebanon. He insisted that Israel's security goals can be met only by solving the Palestinian problem, not by force of arms. Sadat, however, vowed to continue his search for peace. Other Egyptian officials and the media sharply criticized the scale of the Israeli reprisal.

Syria called on the UN Security Council to act immediately. President Asad will probably try to mobilize international pressure against a permanent Israeli presence in south Lebanon, but the Israeli strike already has seriously undermined Syria's claim to be a strong protector of the Palestinian movement and the defender of Lebanon. Syria's announcement that it would provide air cover for Lebanon may in fact be intended to maintain its credibility.

Asad probably hopes that the Israeli attack has dealt a death blow to the Egyptian peace initiative. The Syrian media will focus on Israeli "expansionism" as proof that Egyptian "capitulation" is a dangerous policy. Asad nevertheless must be concerned that the Israeli strike will undermine Lebanon's delicate stability, possibly by encouraging pro-Israeli Christian militants to provoke a confrontation

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